ĀͳM | TEXAS A&M
U N I V E R S I T Y

CALL FOR PROPOSALS - Peer Learning Assistant (PLA) Pilot Grants

The Colleges of Agriculture & Life Sciences and Arts & Sciences have partnered to offer Peer Learning Assistant (PLA) Grants, an initiative to pilot innovative uses of undergraduate students to help facilitate active learning in the classroom. These pilot grants will support the exploration of models that aim to improve student success by using specially trained peer assistants to facilitate active learning assignments during the designated class time. PLAs are students who have previously taken the course, attend the faculty proposer's fall 2025 course, and attend a pedagogy course (options described below). All faculty in the College of Agriculture & Life Sciences and the College of Arts & Sciences are eligible to apply for support through this pilot grant initiative. Each college will review and support proposals for their respective faculty.

Requirements
1. Courses for consideration must be scheduled for the fall 2025 semester as traditional face-to-face, 15-week classes.
2. Faculty whose applications are approved must participate in a Community of Practice cohort composed of faculty from both colleges. This will include at least 3 scheduled meetings (pre-midterm-post) where the pre/post meetings take place in person (lunch will be provided).
3. Selected faculty will meet weekly with their PLAs during the fall 2025 semester to discuss strategies for the coming week's course offerings as well as other relevant issues.
4. Recipients must submit a final report/overall assessment of how the implementation of PLAs impacted student success.
5. An itemized budget that includes the number of managing faculty (if multi-section) and total number of PLAs. Faculty will be compensated $2,000.00. PLAs will be compensated $15/hour for up to 60 hours over the semester that includes attending the pedagogy course and the faculty member's class. PLAs will be onboarded and funded through the faculty member's departmental finance representative. **The budget must NOT include support for teaching buy-outs.**
6. Approval by Department Head for faculty participation.

The following deadlines are for faculty in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences:
- January 23, 2025 – Call for proposals released
- January 27, 2025 – Informational Session 1 via Zoom 2:00 – 3:00 PM (*view recording* here; *login with TAMU credentials and enter password: A=jiv*9N*)
- February 6, 2025 – Informational Session 2 via Zoom 3:00 – 4:00 PM (registration link here)
- February 28, 2025 – *Proposal submission via InfoReady deadline
- March 18, 2025 – Notification of supported proposals
- April 21, 2025 – Identify students to serve as PLAs who will need to enroll in the ASC pedagogy course (described below)

Successful Proposals will include:
- Description of which type of pedagogy course the PLAs will be required to attend as participants in the program (see overview on page 3 for more details)
  - *Option 1* – Require PLAs to attend the zero-credit hour pedagogy course organized by the TAMU Academic Success Center (ASC). This pedagogy course will be taught collaboratively by faculty with expertise in pedagogy and ASC staff. Faculty members

who have PLAs in their courses are strongly encouraged to attend to help align content in the pedagogy course with the facilitation of the active learning assignments.

- o ***Option 2*** – Require PLAs to attend a pedagogy course organized and funded by their own department. For example, the departments of Psychological & Brain Sciences and Chemistry have discipline-specific pedagogy courses. If the faculty proposer has a departmental option they deem more relevant for PLAs to attend, this must be detailed in the proposal along with SCHs tied to the course.
- Description of how weekly prep meetings and in-class active learning sessions will be implemented in their project.
- Include metrics for assessing success of the PLA's experience as well as overall improvement in student success for the students registered in the course.
- Sample syllabus that contains the course name and number and follows minimum syllabus requirements.
- The predicted student enrollment, the traditional classifications of the students (i.e., freshman, sophomores, juniors, etc.), and the number of sections of the course that will use PLAs.
- List of the student learning outcome(s) (SLO) targeted in the proposal.
- Description of why the SLOs were selected for this proposal and an explanation of the challenges/difficulties students have had in achieving the learning outcomes in previous semesters.
- A list of all current academic support provided for the course (if applicable) and the approximate number of hours per week in which support services engaged with students. This could include any graduate teaching assistants, supplemental instructors, tutors, or peer mentors.
- Description how the PLAs will be utilized for active learning in this course.
- List previous professional development activities centered around active learning that proposers have attended (e.g. CTE workshops, TTLC, MoSI, Wakonse, etc.).
- List potential pedagogy course topics you would be interested in covering (not required – see page 3 for details)

Overview
Integrating trained undergraduates into classes as part of the instructional team is an effective way to transform courses from passive learning environments into active learning spaces. Research has documented the effectiveness on student outcomes when trained undergraduate students are used in classes to co-facilitate active learning assignments [see Barasso & Spilios "A scoping review of literature assessing the impact of the learning assistant model" for reference]. One successful program that uses undergraduates to help facilitate learning is the Learning Assistant (LA) Model, a program developed at the University of Colorado-Boulder in 2001 to incorporate small group interaction in their large-enrollment STEM courses. The LA Model is based on three components: 1) a pedagogy course, 2) weekly preparatory meetings, and 3) in-class active learning sessions. These three components work cyclically and concurrently throughout the semester to build strong collaborations and skill sets (see Figure 1). The PLA Pilot Grants are modeled after the LA Program with modifications to include all disciplines within the two participating colleges.
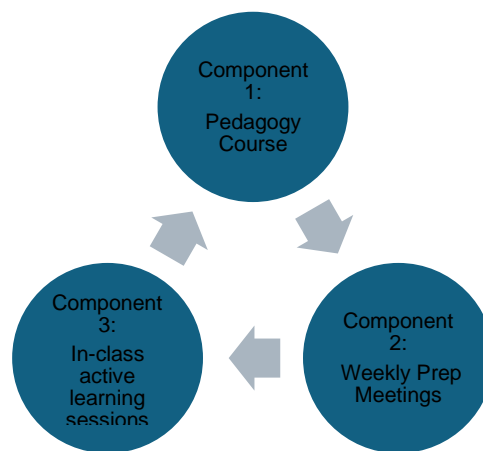

Figure 1: The Three Components Borrowed from CU-Boulder Learning Assistants Model.

Pedagogy Course Offered by Academic Success Center Staff
The course will be a zero-credit, one contact-hour course (ASSC 289) that will meet for 10-11 weeks during the fall 2025 semester on Wednesdays at 8:00 am. Borrowing from the UC Boulder LAA guide: "The pedagogy course introduces new LAs to educational research, active learning, and strategies that support: (1) eliciting student ideas and helping all group members become active and engaged in the class; (2) listening and questioning; (3) building relationships; and (4) integrating learning theories with effective practices. In the pedagogy course, LAs read articles from the education literature, they engage in discussions about their experiences with students and how this relates to the literature, and they complete assignments including weekly teaching reflections and mid-semester evaluations of their work with students." While the course will be coordinated by the Academic Success Center, faculty interested in leading discussions on pedagogical topics listed below are welcome to participate.

Topics will be based on UC Boulder's recommended topics: Growth and Fixed Mindset, Building Relationships with Students, Characteristics of Student Ideas (Prior knowledge, mental models), Learning Theory, Active Listening & Questioning Strategies, Cooperative Learning and Facilitating Meaningful Group Work, Motivation, Formative Assessment & Bridging, Reflective Practice, Motivation--performance vs mastery.